

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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National Assembly for Wales' Enterprise & Learning Committee

Friday, 25th April 2008

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Purpose

This paper is presented to the Committee to inform its inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education (HE) in Wales.

Deeside College is a General Further Education College, based in Flintshire. The College has grown significantly over recent years and now has an annual income of £22m. Deeside College has an outstanding Estyn quality profile and was the first institution in Wales to achieve straight Grade 1s for all seven aspects of both the Further Education (FE), and Work Based Learning (WBL) inspection frameworks. A significant element of Deeside College's growth is linked to the College's work with employers in North Wales, and into Cheshire and the North West of England. These effective relationships with employers have the potential to significantly support the expansion of part-time and work-based HE learning in a region that has relatively low progression to HE.

This paper:

1. Outlines aspects of current links with employers.
2. Summarises current HE level learning provided by Deeside College.
3. Identifies existing barriers to HE level learning.
4. Outlines recommendations for collaborative HE development

Background

Employer Collaboration to Support the Economy

Deeside College has the largest college contract for WBL provision in Wales, and through this, ESF, and other sources of income it engages with a wide range of employers. The College has established an innovative network approach to employer engagement, and this is summarised in the diagram shown in Annex A of this report. The purpose of the network is to engage with businesses by identifying commonality of purpose, and to ensure an inclusive approach that does not disadvantage SMEs and micro-businesses. The networks are organised to meet business needs, and may be structured on the basis of the vocational/business areas where the network has a critical mass, (e.g. Hospitality Academy, Motor Vehicle), size of businesses (e.g. Micro Businesses), and supply chains (e.g. Engineering & Manufacturing).

Deeside College provides a diverse range of training and development opportunities for a wide range of organisations. The following provides an indication of some of this activity, using a categorisation of SMEs (<250 employees), large companies, and public sector organisations.

SMEs

Henrob - Manufacturing

Elegant Resorts - Warehousing and Distribution

B2Business - Various short courses
Knitmesh - Administration
Abakhan - Customer Service
House of Beauty - Team Leading
KK Fine Foods - Leadership & Management (ILM)
Tuscarora – Fork Lift Training and NVQ Plant Operations
Systems Labelling - Learning and Development
Direct Line Communications - Cisco Networking and City & Guilds Networking
West Coast Energy - KTP (Knowledge Transfer Partnership) project

Larger Companies (>250 employees)

My Travel – Engineering (Aerospace Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul)
Promens Packaging Ltd - Fork Lift Truck (FLT) training
Headland Foods - Business Improvement Techniques, Food Manufacture, Assessor Awards
Indesit - FLT, Plant Operations
Paramount Foods - FLT, NVQs in Plant Operations and Food Manufacture
Corus Living Solutions - FLT, Plant Operations, Manufacturing Operations, IT
Money Supermarket.com - ILM, Customer Services, Administration.
Medical Gas - NVQs in Team Leading and Customer Services
Warwick International - NVQ in Team Leading
Airbus - Engineering, Management, Administration, ILM
Babtie - Laboratory Testing
Rowan Foods - Laboratory Testing, Warehouse and Distribution
ConvaTec - Lean Manufacturing

Public Sector Organisations

Flintshire County Council - ILM, IT, Administration, Customer Service
Denbighshire County Council - Hospitality, Warehouse and Distribution
Wrexham County Council - Hospitality and Customer Service
Cheshire County Council - Management, Customer Service, HR
Welsh Health Supplies - Warehouse and Distribution and Administration

HE Learning at Deeside College

HE learning is defined as provision at or above NVQ4 level or equivalent. Deeside College has over 300 HE learners enrolled each year. This is a relatively low number compared to other FE colleges in Wales. All of these learners are enrolled on a part-time basis, attending college on a day release basis or learning in their work place.

The following provides a list of the HE-level courses currently provided by Deeside College, together with enrolment numbers in 2007/08. The enrolment levels are consistent with recent years. The Foundation Degree, HNCs and PGCE/CE are delivered through a franchise arrangement with NEWI. All other programmes are either directly funded by DCELLS through FE funding using the National Planning and Funding System (NPFS), or through full-cost-recovery in the case of NVQ5. Deeside College does not receive any direct HE funding.

Foundation Degree (FD) (27):

Foundation Degree Aeronautical Engineering (27)

Higher National Certificate (HNC) (45):

Electrical & Electronic Engineering (23)

Mechanical Engineering (22)

NVQ4/5 (184)

Management (112)

Administration (15)

Customer Service (2)

Learning & Development (3)

Health & Social Care (27)

Registered Manager (13)

Personnel Management (10)

Laboratory and Associated T (2)

Teacher Training (55)

PGCE/Cert Ed (Post Compulsory Education and Training) (55)

Existing Barriers to HE Learning

1. FEIs in Wales have significant links with employers in their regions. Many of these companies have employees who would benefit from and seek progression in to work-based and part-time HE, often as progression from apprenticeships and other learning. The limited access by FEIs in Wales to direct HE funding, and the sector's inability to develop Foundation Degrees (FDs), limits accessibility and choice for employers. Under existing arrangements FEIs often take the lead on FD development & delivery and in some cases it is difficult to see the "value-added" by the HEI involvement, other than as funding conduit.
2. Many benefits have been achieved from HE franchising arrangements between FE and HE. However, there are inconsistencies in these arrangements and significant variations in the "top slicing" margins enforced by HEIs. These are sometimes excessive and work against ensuring viability of progression routes. Furthermore, HE in FE provision is often the first to be "squeezed" by HEIs when allocated numbers are tight and there is little or no HE growth.
3. The bureaucratic nature of HEI approvals and funding processes often slows down or prevents responsiveness to employer demands. In the case of Deeside College, as a general FE college in an 11-18 area, "specialising" in vocational provision and with strong links with business, we are ideally placed to lead on employer related provision at pre-degree level.
4. For those FEIs such as Deeside College, who are located near the border with England, collaboration with HEIs is made more complex by the wish of some employers to source their HE learning from preferred Universities in England, on the basis of nature of provision and/or quality.
5. In terms of full-time FE level learning, most FEIs have thriving, high quality Access to HE programmes. Many of these learners are females aged between 25-40, with a young family, and would benefit from more local, "family-friendly" HE transition through their local college.
6. Teaching staff in FEIs greatly value the opportunity to teach on HE programmes at FD/HNC level. This is not always the case in HEIs, where there is an understandable focus on higher-level HE, and research. Achievement rates for HE in FE are outstanding, and there are high levels of student & employer satisfaction.

Recommendations

1. Develop a national strategy for the development, and significant expansion of Foundation Degrees (FDs), particularly linked to employer engagement. The existing

role and potential for expansion of the role of many FEIs in developing and delivering FDs should be considered as part of this development.

2. Grant FD awarding powers to FEIs in Wales, linked to criteria for quality and scale of learning.
3. Ensure investment in learners is not limited by overhead costs and bureaucracy, by providing direct funding for FDs in FEIs.
4. Where franchising arrangements are appropriate with HE, develop clear guidelines to ensure consistency and fairness in the distribution of funding.
5. Ensure where necessary, that collaboration with HEIs based in England is not an obstacle to meeting the HE learning needs of employers based in Wales.



EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT NETWORK STRUCTURE

